

Improving Force Closures

By GEORGE A. ROLLINS

The term *improving force closures* (IFC) can cause consternation at first blush. For those unfamiliar with it, IFC might suggest a reduction in personnel or the elimination of an installation; but it is actually a significant feature of military strategy. As defined in Joint Pub 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, a force closure means "The point in time when a supported commander determines that sufficient personnel and equipment resources are in the assigned area of operations to carry out assigned tasks." This article discusses the importance of, and actions taken with regard to, the future role of IFC.

First, to understand IFC one must fracture several military paradigms. The most prevalent is the ever-present propensity to identify requirements, set objectives to achieve them, and institute timetables. This standard military approach is beyond the realm of IFC, which involves all aspects of strategic mobility. Because of the inherent complexity of strategic mobility, a strict orchestration of objectives or timetables is an improbable undertaking at best. A review of the details of mobility supports this point. Strategic mobility includes, in reverse order from a potential combat area, host nation agreements and treaties, host nation facilities, harbors, sealanes to the area, transport ship and aircraft procurement and maintenance, American port and airport facilities along with highways and railways to them, merchant marine ships, commands and

The Army "fleet."



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services, longshoremen's unions, Federal and state highway regulations, and most importantly our national strat-

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egy. Each involves continuous evolution which complicates forming quick or simply understood procedures.

Reductions in force, combined with global insecurity, have dramatically changed the way we carry out

missions. As the only remaining superpower, the United States is increasingly called upon to provide forces for a range of operations, including humanitarian, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement missions. This demands addressing smaller conflicts in many locations.

Accordingly, we must be able to deploy on shorter notice and over greater distances to perform a wider range of missions than before. Many operations involve building coalitions with other nations and working with nongovernmental organizations. Most future deployments of our forces are likely to be a part of a joint operation involving both active and Reserve component forces.

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Attendant to such deployments will be the requirement to transport a large force. Most of our combat power, particularly heavy ground forces, are now in the contiguous forty-eight states. Shipping is the most credible method of transporting bulky forces across the globe. Airlift, though the swiftest mode of transport, has severe weight limitations and thus is mainly used to supplement shipping. It is primarily employed for moving personnel and light equipment whereas shipping by sea is more suitable for hauling ammunition and heavy equipment. Rapidly projecting forces from North America requires a system with fewer personnel and less equipment, especially in the area of strategic mobility. This is the rationale for IFC, which has the sole purpose of ascertaining ways to improve the Nation's ability to transport large forces.

IFC is chartered to develop, implement, and monitor initiatives that improve force closure to include recommendations arising from findings of the *Mobility Requirements Study: Bottom-Up Review Update* (MRS BURU). A general officer steering

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committee is charged with coordinating and guiding IFC activities. It is comprised of representatives of unified commands, services, and relevant agencies and co-chaired by the Director for Operational Plans and Interoperability (J-7) and the Director for Logistics (J-4), Joint Staff. The committee meets three times a year to discuss current mobility and logistical issues. The Joint Staff coordinates inputs through several action officer-level meetings at which members may raise pertinent issues.

IFC came into being in 1989 as a means of improving force closures for Europe (IFCFE). The initial results of IFCFE made it obvious that significant reinforcement efficiencies are attainable through intensive OPLAN analysis



Navy beach group constructing temporary pier.



Ready Reserve Fleet roll-on/roll-off ships

and innovative procedures for executing national strategy. The IFCFE effort showed potential for expanding IFC to other global and regional OPLANs. Thus, in 1990, IFC was mandated to develop recommendations to enhance U.S. capabilities to respond rapidly, effectively, and efficiently to global and regional contingencies. In 1992, IFC received the additional task of addressing recommendations of the Mobility Requirements Study and later from MRS BURU. In 1993 and again in 1994, IFC members unanimously voted to extend the charter, and their recommendation was approved by the Director of the Joint Staff.

Since its inception IFC has addressed topics involving sealift, airlift, prepositioning, force structure, and warfighting requirements. Specific items include Army prepositioning, strategic lift issues raised by CINCs as well as the individual services, strategic sealift, Ready Reserve Force, maritime prepositioning force, joint exercises, West Coast ammunition ports, in-transit and total asset visibility, berth availability, host nation status, Reserve mobilization, MRS BURU implementation, and joint

logistics over the shore, fort-to-port, port-to-port, and port-to-foxhole.

To gain a better perspective on the specific components within their domain, IFC members visited the Hampton Roads area in April 1995, where many of the assets integral to IFC are situated. The tour included Navy Beach Group-2 at Little Creek Amphibious Base, Ready Reserve Force roll-on/roll-off ships at Norfolk and Hampton Roads, and 7th Transportation Group facilities and ships at Fort Eustis. This off-site visit provided a better appreciation of the challenges facing IFC.

The continuing relevancy of IFC stems from its ability to address most strategic mobility issues. As our national military strategy is redefined and becomes more efficient, IFC is assisting in this complicated process. The general officer steering committee recently refined the purpose of IFC as a sounding board, forum, and reference for recommendations or proposals involving force closures. This will provide an avenue for sharing information among all components to improve our overall force closure capability.

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